**I would like you to reflect upon how this content about brain-based learning resonates with your own experiences as a learner.  To what extent do they "ring true" with you?**

As I reflected upon what I read in the text, what stood out to me the most was the section about stress and its implications for learning. In my elementary years, I was the student who blew off school, did no homework, did not study, and lied to my parents about my performance in school (which obviously only worked until progress reports or report cards came home). However, when I began my 6th grade year at the local public middle school, my attitude towards school and learning drastically changed. I began to study, do all of my work, participate in class, and obtain straight A’s. Along with this change came a change in my mental health. During the school day, my stomach was in constant knots for fear of quizzes, tests, and that night’s homework. I was often sick, but refused to stay home in case I would miss something important. At home, I would do homework or study until I fell asleep on my books. This trend continued throughout high school and college, and only worsened as I began participating in year-round sports. I loved to learn, but I lived in constant fear of underperforming. Therefore, school became a place of terror. Despite this, I knew I had to continue doing what I was doing because I did not want to let anyone down. It was not until my sophomore year of college that I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder, which explained the behavior.

**How are the concepts in pp. 5-94 being applied or disregarded?**

Stress was a large factor in my ability to learn, but for different reasons than it is for many of my students. I work in a school with a diverse culture and about 80% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch, indicating that they are living below the poverty line in accordance with state standards. Statistics show that it is not poverty that influences learning; rather, it is the stress that comes with living in poverty that affects the students. One thing that I do to reduce their stress is to not give homework other than to study the concepts we have learned in class. I do this because, often, after my students leave school, they go home and are expected to care for younger siblings, help out with the family business, cook, clean, or do other duties. In many of their cultures, home is considered the place to learn about domestic life, whereas school is the place for academic learning. Therefore, it is not that education is not valued; rather, in some cultures, it comes second to teaching domestic duties in the students’ home. Also, many times, parents are working to try to support their family. If students do not understand a concept while learning about it during the school day, doing homework with no assistance will be no help.

Other ways that I try to reduce student stress is to allow them many different ways to demonstrate their understanding of a topic. I do this by rotating the type of assessments that I give between written tests, essays, projects, skills tests, and laboratory experiments. This way, even if a student is not good at demonstrating their knowledge in one way, they can show it in another. However, I do use all types of assessments, so that students can strengthen their abilities in different areas. I also do not call on students randomly, or to try to “catch” them not paying attention. If I want certain students to participate, I require all students to share out their thoughts to an open-ended question.

One important brain-based activity that I seem to disregard is energizers. I teach 90-minute class periods, and by the end of some days, my students are getting restless if we have not done some type of lab where they could get up and move around the room.

**What might you do differently now (in your own personal learning or in your work)?**

To support my personal learning, I have begun to use some of the techniques that I learned about from the text to lessen my stress and prime my brain to process knew knowledge. First, since I began reading the text, I have started playing soft, classical piano music while doing schoolwork. The music seems to calm my nerves and allow me to focus on the material I am working on. Second, I schedule frequent breaks where I get up and walk around. This way, I do not experience “mental block” and frustration. Next, since I have started bringing a water bottle to school and limiting my coffee intake to one cup, I have experienced fewer lags in energy throughout the day. Lastly, I have started to inform my graduate school instructors about my specific learning needs if I feel their course does not match my own. I also ask them about their policy on re-doing work. If I know that I have the option to redo my work in order to improve it for a better grade, I often perform better the first time because I experience less stress because the task seems achievable. I also tend to go above and beyond what was expected.

In my classroom, I know that I should not consider hands-on work or lab work to be sufficient as the only energizers used in a class period. I now know movement strategies such as cross-laterals that I should use with my students at specified times, and when they begin to get restless or unfocused. I also intend to incorporate downtime more often. Downtime would be helpful at the start of the class period to prepare students brains for learning, and at the end of each period to allow the content to sink in. Finally, because of the statistics in the text about learners and their rate of progression in math and reading due to the addition of sunlight, I have begun leaving the blinds to my classroom windows open. Although it is more of a pain to continuously open and close them when I am trying to show something with my projector, it is an easy factor to control that that will better my students’ moods and learning in the end.